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Author(s): J. C. Davies

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Mythological Influences on the First Emergence of Greek Scientific and Philosophical Thought

by J. C. DAVIES

THE study of the first beginnings of Greek philosophy is of intense interest to the student of mythology and folklore. For in such a context one is able to apprehend all the more clearly both the impact of a novel rationalism upon traditional beliefs, and also the extent to which the latter are adapted and modified to reappear within the fabric of a coherent philosophy. The thesis of this article is that, so far from there being a gulf between traditional beliefs, religious or mythological on the one hand (and any distinction between them at this date is difficult to define), and the emergence of science on the other, it is possible to trace many of the earlier influences within the later system. The change is undeniably a generic one, but it is not at all as abrupt and as clearly defined as many commentators would have us believe. Furthermore, the constant influence exerted by pre-scientific beliefs is of more than merely historical interest since without a full appreciation of these elements within it, the new science as a whole would be incomprehensible.

A study of the mythological elements within early Greek philosophy has some notable advantages over those conducted in certain more familiar historical contexts. In the first place there is *ex hypothesi* no earlier scientific or rationalist tradition to complicate the clarity of the comparison, making it easier to trace the exact source of elements in the later system, and the degree of influence exerted upon the scientific *corpus* by these earlier beliefs. The student of folklore has a clear field for exploration, and he is not first required to disentangle the threads of successive scientific traditions before he can safely engage in an examination of his particular interest. Again, in Asia Minor at the beginning of the

sixth century B.C. we are confronted by a new tradition of rationalist thought which enjoyed a clearly defined development from the time of Thales (624-546 B.C.) until the atomist philosophy of Democritus in the fifth century B.C., when, under the influence of the Sophists, or itinerant professional teachers, interest in man and his relation to the state and to his fellows replaced the earlier pre-occupation with natural philosophy. Conclusive evidence is accordingly available of the historical development of prominent characteristics in the earliest systems as the rationalist tradition gained momentum. Finally, a preliminary *caveat* is necessary if the character of this rationalism is not to cause confusion. At this early stage science was indistinguishable from philosophy, since what was advanced by Thales and his successors was usually a speculative attempt to describe the workings of Nature but without the assistance of most of the accepted modern techniques of demonstration and experiment.

Accounts of popular pre-scientific conceptions of the universe are obtainable from Homer, Pindar, Hesiod, and Xenophanes, all of whom are writing not for a 'specialist' audience, but rather for popular ears. In most of these some description of the Underworld appears, and the general agreement of such accounts testifies to a widespread popular acceptance of the tradition. In the 'Iliad'¹ Homer describes 'misty Tartaros' as 'very far down, where is the deepest chasm below the earth; iron gates are there and a floor of bronze, as far beneath Hades as the sky is from the earth'. Hesiod² supports the view that it has a brazen content when he says: 'Around Tartaros there stretches a fence of bronze and around it threefold Night flows freely about its neck; above are the roots of the earth and the unharvested sea.' Although there is a certain vagueness about the distances separating the various sections of the world below, it is clear that Tartaros is understood as being the lowest of the various sections with a floor of bronze and therefore impenetrable for the souls directed there for punishment;³ above Tartaros was Hades, and above Hades the Earth. Xenophanes, a later writer,⁴ offers a slightly different, but also probably a popular conception when he says: 'This is the upper limit of the Earth

¹ *Iliad*, 8, 13; cf. Pindar, *N.* 6, 3-4.

² *Theogony*, 726.

³ Plato, *Phaedo*, 113 ff.

⁴ Fr. 28 (Diels-Kranz: *Die Fragmente Der Vorsokratiker*).

which appears near our feet, close to the air; but the lower section of it stretches onward indefinitely.'

Embracing the world and also supporting it like a floating disk there flows the vast river Okeanos, which apparently possesses a double significance, for it is both the river which surrounds the known world, and is also the source of all other rivers, all water, and, it would appear, of all other forms of matter and life. The former aspect of Okeanos appears in Homer who declares: 'Mighty indeed is the deep-eddying Okeanos from whom all rivers and all seas and all fountains and deep wells flow'⁵. Herodotus confirms the popularly-accepted view when he says: 'The Greeks declare that Okeanos starting from the rising of the sun flows around the whole earth, but they do not supply any demonstrative proof of this.'⁶ It has been suggested⁷ that this view was probably prompted by the apparent circularity of the Universe as one gazes at the horizon, and by travellers' stories of distant seas beyond the Pillars of Hercules to the west and Arabia to the east, and also by the Danube to the north and the Nile to the south together with the apparent boundless source which the size of their streams suggested must exist beyond the horizon of the known world. To such sources and conceptions as these the later theory of Thales is plainly much indebted. Cross links are however perceptible with similar stories in Babylonian and Egyptian lore,⁸ and it is arguable that the myth is not entirely of Greek origin. In the Babylonian epic of creation Apsu and Tiamat were the male and female principles of primordial water, viz.: 'When on high the Heaven had not been named, firm ground below had not been called by name, nothing but Primordeal Apsu, their begetter, and Munnu-Tiamat, she who bore them all, their waters commingling as a single body; no reed had been matted, no marsh land had appeared'.⁹ Similarly, in the Egyptian mythogony Nun, the primeval expanse of waters, in the beginning encircles the creator god Re: 'I am Atum when I was alone in Nun: I am Re in his first appearances when he began to rule that which he had made'.¹⁰ Such an emphasis of the role of

⁵ *Iliad*, 21, 194.

⁶ IV, 8.

⁷ Cf. *The Presocratic Philosophers*. Kirk and Raven, Cambridge (1957), page 12.

⁸ Cf. *Ancient Near-Eastern Greek Texts*. Ed. J. B. Pritchard (Princeton, 2nd ed. 1955), p. 60 f.

⁹ Cf. *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, (trans. J. A. Wilson) *ad loc.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

water in the creation myths of both Babylon and Egypt is clearly a result of the dependence of these civilizations themselves upon the great river systems around which they developed, and the Greek borrowing is probably an implicit recognition by the younger civilization of the similar dependence of itself and of all life upon the presence of water.

The first full descriptions of the creation in Greek sources appear in Hesiod's 'Theogony', viz.:

'Indeed, first of all Chaos came into being, and then broad-bosomed Gaia, a firm seat for all things for evermore, and dusky Tartaros in a cranny of Earth with its broad ways and Eros who is the fairest of the immortal gods, . . . Out of Chaos came Erebos and black Night. . . and from Night came Aither and Day. . . . But Earth bore starry Ouranos, . . . to cover her around and to serve as a firm seat for the gods for evermore. Then she bore the tall mountains, the sea, and Okeanos'.¹¹

There are obvious discrepancies in the order of creation between this and the accounts of Okeanos in Homer, and it has been suggested¹² that this may represent Hesiod's attempt to amalgamate different traditions within a single story, for in a later passage he returns to the traditional conception of Okeanos as the source of all the rest of creation,¹³ viz:

'The whole earth boiled, the streams of Okeanos and the unharvested sea. . . and a wondrous burning seized hold of Chaos. . . .'

The relationship between Okeanos and Chaos has been the subject of some conjecture, and the most interesting and likely suggestion has been that in the first of the two passages mentioned above 'Chaos' refers to the 'gap'¹⁴ which occurred between earth and sky when these were first separated from one another, and the very act of division of earth and sky is accordingly itself subject to the tendency toward theistic personification with which early Greek tradition abounds. In other Greek cosmogonies Okeanos does not appear, and great importance is attached to the separation of earth

¹¹ IIS. I I 6 ff.

¹³ IIS. 695 ff.

¹² Kirk and Raven, *op. cit.* page 26.

¹⁴ Greek *χάος*.

and sky. Yet, even if these traditions make no specific mention of Okeanos, the assumption of such an ultimate source is not at all inconsistent with the remainder of the cosmogonical account, and this would make it possible to assume that the traditions we do possess are drawn from a single source which has, however, suffered certain modifications in later transmissions.¹⁵

In the scientific philosophies of Thales and Anaximander there reappear in a rationalist system all the various elements of these mythologies, but they occur now in a new guise within a closely connected and reasoned account of the universe, in which acceptance of a tradition yields to the recognition of a first principle from which the remainder of the account may be rationally understood. But if earlier pre-philosophical cosmogonies have an undisputed influence on the cosmogony of the Milesians and later thinkers it is also true that the later spirit of philosophical inquiry was likewise influenced in no small measure by other aspects of earlier mythological belief. Thus explanations of the creation, as for example in Hesiod's 'Theogony', account for the creation of all sections of the universe in terms of a series of marriages and begettings on the part of the gods who are endowed by superstition with personal identities. That the established beliefs also possessed prestige and authority is clear from the many extant references in ancient literature which assume an unquestioning acceptance of them. There is thus already to hand an *orderly development* in individual cosmogonies which is a necessary pre-requisite to the formulation of a system which owes less to religio-mythological belief and more to a detached intellectual view of the universe and its creation. But if the great influence of the older mythologies provided a useful starting point for more purely intellectual speculation about the world, it was also strong enough to ensure that traces of it remained incorporated *within* the fabric of the new

¹⁵ For example, in a fragment of Euripides (484) we read: 'And . . . earth and sky were one form; and when they had been separated from each other, they produced all other things'. Diodorus (1.7.1.) offers a similar account, viz.: 'For by the original composition of the universe, earth and sky had one form; and afterwards when their bodies had separated from one another, the world took on the general arrangement which we see in it. . . .' Apollonius Rhodius (1.496) also, speaking of Orpheus, says: 'He sang how earth and sea and sky, being formerly connected with each other in one form, through destructive strife separated apart from each other'. The first principles of these accounts are not further delineated, but such an ultimate source as the Okeanos of the primitive mythologies mentioned above would not be inconsistent with them.

philosophical accounts which superseded them. The boldness of the first philosophers in discrediting the role of an Okeanos, an Ouranos or a Gaia in the creation of the world, and their insistence that the fundamental nature of reality is to be understood rather in terms of such substances as water, mist, or the Boundless, was truly remarkable. Despairing of the possibility of obtaining a coherent and reasoned description of reality from the mythology at their disposal, they sought instead for a secular account in terms of first principles founded upon reason alone. But it would indeed be surprising if this had been achieved at once and completely. Nor do we find that this was the case; rather, the universe retains in the systems of the Milesians and others some of the characteristics it had possessed in the earlier traditions.

Thales' assertion that all things are water represents just one such attempt to offer a single comprehensive account of all the apparently unconnected *varia* of our experience. He was trying to discover a simple causal relation existing between the wide apparent diversity of substances. For this water appeared to provide the key. All the known world was situated near or in the immediate hinterland of the Mediterranean and the great river systems of the Nile, the Tigris and Euphrates, and the Danube. Human life clearly depended on water for its very existence, and where there was none, as in the North African desert, it was not to be found. Not merely human life but animal and plant life too had an obvious need for water in order to survive. Furthermore Thales had travelled in Egypt and Mesopotamia. He was familiar with the Nile and the remorseless growth of the Delta as a result of the continuous silting up of its outlet — which probably impressed him once more with the elemental quality of water which accordingly suggested itself not merely as a necessary pre-requisite of human, vegetable, and animal existence, but also as a likely source of mineral formation as well. The river seemed to be ever giving birth to the land. . . . Moreover, water has the most unusual quality of being easily convertible into a hard material (ice) on the one hand, and a gaseous substance (steam) on the other. And here Thales believed that he had discovered the clue for which he had been searching to unravel the secrets of the universe! Water could change itself into several visible forms, from steam or air (the Greek philosophers had not yet distinguished them) on the one

hand to ice and other hard materials (such as the earth and stones of the Nile) on the other. Between these two extremes all the rest of vegetable growth, animal bones and tissues, and even mineral deposits could plausibly be shown to owe their existence and character to the presence of water. All things, as Thales said, are therefore ultimately water.

But it is not so much his *results* for which Thales deserves our esteem; his *method* was a vital first step in the development of science. Instead of resorting to traditional stories about the gods to explain the phenomena of wind and waves, of birth and growth and death, Thales with one bold stroke dismissed such divine agency and sought instead for a rational account of the universe and its behaviour. After collating the varied data available in such diverse sources as medicine and human geography, agriculture and earthquakes, Thales produced a 'hypothesis' with which he attempted to account for such phenomena. In doing this he was adopting a method which in embryo possessed strong similarities with modern practice in the promulgation of a scientific law. For to formulate a scientific law is *to account* for previously unexplained phenomena. It is not to *describe* them (which is what the natural historian does), nor yet to *deduce* from observed particular instances to a conclusion. Our theoretical statements are neither generalization from the data nor other logical constructs otherwise derived from them, but rather principles in accordance with which we can make inferences about phenomena. We tend to show how the data we possess may be better understood and accounted for in terms of such principles and the latter are more or less satisfactory in accordance with the extent to which they satisfy, or fail to satisfy, such data. That Thales envisaged his 'principle' in this light may be confirmed by a glance at his cosmology.

The earth itself he believed to be shaped like a disc and to be floating on water. The latter thus supported the earth both in the physical sense and also in the sense that the earth had originally evolved from water, while its rivers and seas were being constantly renewed by this primordial substance. The occasional rocking of the floating earth accounts for what we know as earthquakes and such movements also produce the winds. The clouds and all the heavenly bodies are also water in a state of incandescence. By means of the magnet Thales went on to demonstrate the

presence of the 'life-force' which he believed to exist in all substance, and, probably to account for the movement and vitality which we observed in the universe as a whole, he maintained a form of pantheism with the assertion that 'Everything is full of gods'.¹⁶ Such theism differs both from the popular conception that gods dwell within the realm of nature as in the Homeric scene and fully endowed with both identity and personality, and also from all suggestion, as in the preceding mythological traditions, that the gods themselves create the world through an intricate system of inter-marriage. The new system of Thales offered instead a novel form of pantheism which was the climate within which his own and successive scientific accounts of reality developed. The 'divine' for Thales is something almost within our grasp, inseparable from the objects of perception. It is now impossible to trace the exact details of Thales' meaning of his assertion that 'Everything is full of gods'. We can, however, be sure that his beliefs mark a clear departure from the orthodox to a new view of the world. On the other hand we should beware of assuming that with Thales there is an abrupt and complete break with mythological and religious tradition and instead a comprehensive change toward a rationalist and intellectuallist spirit of inquiry. Although this may be true in very general terms, there is also an evident survival of sympathy for the older tradition, and it is often a shock to readers to discover that this is still true even 200 years later in the Aristotelean theory, in which the heavenly bodies are regarded as animate. The influence of pre-philosophical systems is, however, much more apparent in the more informative extant fragments and accounts of Thales' successor at Miletus, Anaximander.

Anaximander's major contribution lay in his development of Thales' cosmology. Thales' suggestion that everything is water appeared too naive to Anaximander. For, if this were the case and everything arose out of water, then it would be difficult to account for the presence of the opposite quality 'Dryness' in nature. Moreover, if existence is itself synonymous with the state of 'Wetness', then the process of drying must inevitably be a curtailment of that existence, and total dryness would have to be equated with non-existence, or at least with decay. But this will not do. The world of our experience contains dry as well as wet materials which

¹⁶ Aristotle, *de Anima* A 5, 411a 7; cf. Aetius I, 7, 11.

exist for lengthy periods apparently enjoying a stability as great as, if not greater than, moist or soluble substances. Therefore it will not do to equate Wetness with Existence; some other solution had to be found. Anaximander attempted to resolve the difficulty by suggesting that the world of 'Percepts' — or perceived substances — cannot be explained in terms of one of these substances themselves; if this were so, everything would long ago have either resolved itself into it or ceased to exist. Instead Anaximander declared that all percepts must be understood as evolving from some more fundamental, unperceived material which he called the 'Boundless'.¹⁷

With rigorous logic Anaximander next took the momentous step of deducing that since the Boundless was without limit, it must *ex hypothesi* be capable of producing not one but an infinite number of worlds of which our world is one. To reach such a conclusion and to accept its implications required an effort of imagination such as no other human being had yet revealed. The world as men understood it was that enclosed by the Mediterranean and the great river systems of the Nile, Euphrates and Tigris, and the Danube. To have suggested that there might be an unknown continent beyond the pillars of Hercules or the African Desert would itself have required a bold and unusual vision; but the assertion that the lands and seas and skies which comprise this world are endlessly reduplicated inevitably came from one who possessed a mind more than usually free from conventional habits of thought. This is indeed all the more remarkable in that Anaximander had none of the techniques and knowledge of modern astronomy to reveal to him the vastness of the universe; he was proceeding by the light of reason alone, and by strict logic, to a conclusion of which his premisses, based on observation but guided by reason, alone apprised him.

Anaximander appears to have conceived that each separate world was born in the same way. From the Boundless the four main elements, earth, air, fire and water, were 'separated-out' in a process resembling that of a sieve. First the heaviest element, earth, sank to the centre and was surrounded by the lighter elements

¹⁷ Hippolytus, *Ref.* 1 (Diels Kranz *op. cit.* 12 A 11) writes: 'Anaximander said that the material principle of existing things was some nature described as the Boundless from which the heavens and the world around them came into existence. This nature is eternal and does not grow old and it embraces all the worlds.'

in their turn; thus water engulfed the earth and was itself surrounded by air, while the whole was embraced by the lightest element, fire. But after, or perhaps during, the process of separating-out, each of the elements reacted on the others. The fire heated the water, and as the latter evaporated, the dry land appeared. The evaporation of the water in its turn increased the the pressure within the cocoon of fire until this, finally, burst into countless pieces wrapped in 'tubes' of mist. The open ends of these tubes allow us, when they are turned towards us, to see the fire within; such is the nature of the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon, and stars. And what we refer to as 'eclipses' are the successive openings and closing of these tubes, and their continual movements toward and away from our vision. Other heavenly motions such as that of the sun on the ecliptic, the monthly cycle of the moon and the wanderings of the planets are the result of the winds. These themselves are explained in terms of the exhalation that rises upwards from beneath the sun; the rain is the result of the condensation of moist vapours which had previously evaporated; while the clouds are the result of the massing together of evaporated moisture. Other heavenly phenomena, such as thunder, lightning, whirlwinds, and storms, Anaximander attributed to the action of the wind, which is sometimes shut up in a cloud and then bursts out to create a thunderclap, while the force of the rift thus made in the clouds produces the flash of lightning; such violent behaviour by the wind occasionally results in whirlwinds and storms, presumably in accordance with the strength and altitude of the wind concerned.

The earth itself, according to Anaximander, was shaped 'like a drum' and was poised in space. He attributed its equilibrium and its equidistance from the walls of the world which surrounded it to the fact that it had no reason for moving either one way or the other, but rather remained still, held up by nothing, due to its similar distance from all things. Such a conception deserves our acclaim due to the advance it makes over the naive notion of Thales that the earth floats on water. Anaximander takes a brilliant leap into the unknown to supply such an account of the earth's behaviour, relying on the conclusions of reason alone, and rejecting the suggestion of ordinary experience that everything needs *something* to rest upon to prevent it falling.

On the surface of our world the land was continually gaining over the sea, while the latter was drying up due to the continuation of the process with which the initial separation of the elements took place. Anaximander demonstrated this by reference to the fossils which he had himself discovered high in the mountains of Asia Minor, suggesting that these mountains had once been covered by the sea. Eventually, it seemed, the sea would completely dry up. There appears to be some contradiction in the sources at this point since Anaximander is quoted as saying that the four elements successively encroach on and yield to each other, 'paying penalty and retributions to each other for their injustice according to the assessment of Time'. A not altogether satisfactory reconciliation of these two views of the elements may be effected if we assume that in the short term there is an apparent balance in the states of earth and water, but that over the ages and at the end of foreseeable time the world as we know it will cease to be, and all will merge once more, first into fewer substances and then ultimately into the Boundless itself. This view is confirmed by some ancient authorities who state that Anaximander believed that the Boundless 'was the whole cause of the birth and the destruction of the world'. Such a theory of the successive births and deaths of the innumerable worlds would concur with the nature of the One Substance which will reabsorb everything that has arisen from it 'according to necessity'. Necessity and Divinity appear to be closely connected ideas in Anaximander's cosmology since we find him describing the universe as divine and eternal and our own world, even if ultimately doomed to reabsorption within the Boundless, as also divine in so far as it is part of the divine Whole. Such a theistic view of matter, incorporating — like Thales' earlier theory — all traditional views of personal divinities within a new concept of divine substance, finds amplification in the determinism, noticed above, according to which all things happen by necessity. This is not a necessity divinely superimposed on a submissive universe, but the very expression of that universe remorselessly developing as ordained by its own *immanent* divinity. This rudimentary fatalistic view of Nature was later to find expression in Heracleitus, and then more fully in the Stoic theology which was to have such an important influence on the Hellenistic Age and the Roman world.

It would be a reasonable assumption that the concept of one substance responsible for the origin of all things, which also 'surrounds' the whole of reality, owed much to the pre-philosophical conception of Okeanos. Even if this be doubted, the epithets 'eternal' and 'ageless' which are employed to describe the Boundless are clearly indebted to a theistic view of the universe¹⁸. Another account¹⁹ declares that: 'The source of coming to be for existing things is that into which destruction also takes place according to necessity; for they pay penalty and retribution to each other according to the ordinance of Time'. The view that the interaction of substances is limited and that they are punished for excessive intrusion upon one another is an obvious trace of the current belief in the Greek deity Nemesis who was herself a daughter of Okeanos.²⁰ She is a personification of the moral reverence for law, of the natural fear of committing a wrong, and hence of conscience.²¹ The indebtedness of the above account to the conception of such a deity is but one more indication of the extent of the debt owed by the Milesians to the beliefs of mythology.²² The ascription of such epithets as 'divine' and 'immortal' to the Boundless likewise satisfies the loftiest demands of religious thought, and suggest that we are here in contact with a thinker who is influenced by more than the principles of the scientist alone, and with a world view that is as much religious as scientific.²³

Similar influences may be observed in the concept of Air which was the fundamental substance in the theory of Anaximenes, the third of the early Milesian thinkers. According to the ancient commentators, he too held that his basic substance was divine.²⁴ One such writer declares of him: 'Anaximenes attributed all the causes of things to divine air, and did not deny that there were gods, or pass them over in silence; yet he believed not that air was made by them but that they were made from air'.²⁵ This is a supreme example, matched perhaps only by Epicureanism in the

¹⁸ *Vide supra*, note 17.

¹⁹ Simplicius *Phys.* 24 (Diels Kranz 12 A 9).

²⁰ Hesiod, *Theogonis*, 223.

²¹ Homer, *Iliad*, 13, 121.

²² Cf. Aristotle, (*Phys.* 4, 203 b7): 'And this is the divine; for it is immortal and indestructible, as Anaximander says and most of the physical speculators'.

²³ For a different emphasis, cf. Professor Farrington's *Greek Science*, (Pelican), Vol. 1, pp. 32 ff.

²⁴ Cf. Aetius 1, 7, 13, and Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, 1, 10, 26.

²⁵ Augustinus, *C.D.* VIII, 2.

ancient world, of the incorporation of all the ramifications of a traditional mythology within an otherwise consistently naturalistic philosophy.

It should now be clear that an important part of the heritage of the Milesian thinkers was a predisposition to account for the creation and nature of the world in terms of their theistic inclinations. It has been suggested that this influence upon Thales and his successors was very strong and that the high degree of success with which they freed themselves from it and inclined rather towards a more scientific conception of reality is a measure of their intellectual greatness. It is possible, on the other hand, to over-emphasize the extent to which the Milesian systems are subject to the religious and mythological influences we have described and an effort must be made to obtain the correct emphasis in any account of these and other influences to which they were subject. It is easy, for example, to pay scant attention to the nature of the Milesian contribution to scientific reasoning, and to the beginnings of a scientific method by which Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes formulated their successive principles, and to enlarge instead upon their great debt both to the techniques of the older civilizations of Egypt and Babylon and also to the religio-mythological heritage we have discussed. But to do this would constitute a failure to recognize the real novelty of their contribution to scientific method. Thales' true greatness lies, not in his many-sided genius as engineer, politician, mathematician, astronomer, nor in the examination of the principle that 'Everything is water' which, in itself, is remarkable. His genius lies rather in his probable method by which the various unrelated *data* of experience are accounted for in terms of a single hypothesis.²⁶ He and his fellow Milesians truly deserved the name of scientist for the success with which they undertook the systematic organization of the many traditions at their disposal and invested them with a new rationalist interpretation.

If therefore we are to define the character of Milesian philosophy in every particular aspect that it reveals, we should first have to provide a complete description of the several elements within it, namely the influence of the techniques of the time (largely derived

²⁶ Cf. Heraclitus Homericus, *Quaest. Hom.* 22; Aristotle, *Met.* A 3, 983 f.

from Egyptian and Babylonian sources),²⁷ the tradition of religious-mythological explanation which the Milesians inherited, and the stimulus to philosophical inquiry which was the product of so many diverse influences, geographical, social, and ethnic among them. But such a mere enumeration of possible influences would not be enough; it would be necessary to state what appeared to be the relative importance of such influences within the systems concerned. A tentative conclusion to such a demand would inevitably recognize the pervading influence of the religious and mythological inheritance which was at hand, and would, I suggest, evaluate it as the descriptive medium, the very fabric of the thought and language alike, in which the new philosophy is written. Habits of thought and traditional methods of explanation have an enduring influence, even in the formulation of so rigorous a new scientific outlook as that of the Milesians of the sixth century B.C.

²⁷ Cf. Farrington, *op. cit. passim*.